DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 088 085 CS 201 066

AUTHOR Martinsson, Ann
TITLE Free Written Composition at the Middle Level of Comprehensive School (FRIS).
INSTITUTION National Swedish Board of Education, Stockholm.
PUB DATE Sep 73
NOTE 19p.; Report of research in progress at The Department of Educational and Psychological Research, Malmo School of Education
JOURNAL CIT School Research Newsletter; v17 Entire Issue September 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50
DESCRIPTORS *Composition (Literary); Composition Skills (Literary); *Creative Writing; *Intermediate Grades; Language Ability; Language Development; *Language Research; *Linguistic Performance; Social Differences
IDENTIFIERS *Sweden

ABSTRACT

A project currently being conducted in Sweden on free written composition at the middle level of comprehensive school is described. The principal aims of the project are listed under three headings: linguistic quality and linguistic development, stimulus measures preparatory to writing, and social differences in writing ability. Included in the description are a timetable for the project, references to other projects, the population of the project, preliminary results, and further sub-studies. (MOD)

SCHOOL RESEARCH

newsletter

ED 088 085

September 1973 Current Project 1973:17

Title of project: Free written composition at the middle level of comprehensive school (FRIS)

In progress at: The Department of Educational and Psychological Research, Malmö School of Education

Project leader: Ann Martinsson

Scientific leader: Ebbe Lindell

1. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

The project will be described in interim reports and this section is accordingly confined to elements common to all the various fields of the project. More detailed surveys of literature, detailed descriptions of experiments and instruments and all presentations of results are to be found in individual reports.

1.1 Aims of the project

The principal aims of the project can be divided into three heads: linquistic quality and linquistic development, stimulus measures preparatory to writing and social differences of writing ability.

CS 201 064

The studies of linguistic quality and linguistic development comprise studies to see what objective measurements can be established in written production and a validation of these measurements. Many different kinds of criteria may be used in this validation, the most obvious being the pupils' examination awards. Tests of various kinds may also be considered, above all those which in other contexts have proved to be connected with overall assessments of essays. These include e.g. tests of disposition and correct language. Others include intelligence tests and various kinds of verbal tests. Tests of the kind constructed in the course of research in the sphere of creativity are particularly valuable. It may also be important to ascertain the linguistic idiosyncrasies of pupils with good attitudes to and great interest in verbal activities.

The above validation techniques entail correlation studies. Differential studies constitute another form of validation. One such study is being carried out in FRIS by comparing the linguistic usage of children's writers with that of pupils treating the same subject matter in their essays.

The studies of stimulus measures preparatory to writing which have been carried out as part of FRIS have taken the form of experimental studies in school situations. In one experiment a comparison was made of production under various degrees of control via stimuli and focussing on empirical or emotional treatment. In another experiment the pupils wrote about different subjects chosen on the basis of the content of popular children's books. A third experiment entailed simultaneous variation between, in one dimension, "creative" and "formal" instruction and, in the other dimension, between different degrees of verisimilitude.

Pupil groups for the project were recruited with special regard to the study of social differences of linguistic ability. Three school districts in Malmö were selected to represent high, intermediate and low groups in relation to a sociological index. Differences between the sexes are being studied parallel to social differences.

1.2 Timetable for the project

Since the aims of the project included a study of linguistic development, the same group of pupils has been followed for three school years. During this period the following collections of data were made.

Grade 4	autumn term 1970	Free written composition, "At the Museum"
	spring term 1971	Test of general intelligence and verbal ability Questionnaire re attitudes to written activities
Grade 5	autumn term 1971	Experiment re types of stimulus, "The Cat"
	spring term 1972	Experiment re types of stimulus, "The Children's Book" Questionnaire re essay subject preferences
Grade 6	autumn term 1972	Creativity test Experiments re types of stimulus, "Near - Far"
	spring term 1973	Free written composition, "On the Camping Site"

The development study is based on comparisons of the two free written compositions, which are separated by the widest possible interval of time within the same school level. The validations are above all based on the analyses of "At the Museum". The various tests are utilized together with the essay awards as criteria. The experiments concerning types of stimulus have been applied at three junctures, but the pupils' views concerning what they would like to work on in their writing are also collected by means of the questionnaires. A later section will describe how the aim of studying social differences is achieved.

1.3 Reference to other projects

FRIS has called for detailed linguistic analyses. A system of language description had been compiled during the UMT project (Teaching Methodology in German) in co-operation with the Institute for German at the University of Lund, where guidance was given by Professor Inger Rosengren. But this system was dominated by the contrasts between the two languages and was concerned with the difficulties encountered by Swedish pupils learning the new language.

Almost simultnaeously with FRIS and independently of it, the Writing Syntax project concerning written Swedish in upper secondary school began at the Institute for Nordic Studies in Lund. This project was led by Bengt Loman and was closely connected with the Speech Syntax project begun by him earlier. The object of Written Syntax was to carry out the linguistic surveys on which to base a) the search for objective measurements of the quality of essays and b) the compilation of written practice programmes for upper secondary school.

In the Writing Syntax project a manual of sentence analysis (Mamba) was compiled, mainly under the leadership of Professor Ulf Teleman. "Mamba" has also formed the basis of FRIS' linguistic analyses. Linguistic experts taking part and having experience of both Written Syntax and FRIS include Tor Hultman, lecturer in methods, and assistants Gerty Engh and Kerstin Naucler.

The sub-project Swedish Measurement was connected with Writing Syntax and was designed to validate the linguistic qualities gained through Written Syntax. To this end comparisons with upper secondary school essay awards. The awards had been made for the purposes of the project by a group of teachers and journalists.

To this work was added the Teaching Material Model project, whose purposes have been defined as follows by its leader, Åke Pettersson: "to compile concrete material for upper secondary school writing practice which to the greatest possible extent will attain the goals indicated by the results of the sub-projects Writing Syntax and Swedish Measurement": "to evaluate the effect of various methods for the attainment of the predefined goals."

Writing Syntax also includes the sub-project Professional Prose, led by Margareta Westman. The purpose of this sub-project is "to plot and describe modern informative everyday prose with a view to obtaining comparative material for the simultaneous description of upper secondary school prose composition and, not least, a point of reference for written practice in upper secondary school."

As has already been indicated, FRIS has been dependent on the projects described, above all for the sake of their specialist knowledge concerning the linguistic descriptions. But these projects also provide interesting points of

reference for the study of language at different levels. Arguments and outlooks will be included in descriptions of results from FRIS, even though it has not been possible for the co-ordination of the projects, e.g. with regard to recruitment and the choice of essay subjects to be taken far enough to facilitate stricter comparisons.

2. PUPILS TAKING PART

For the sake of social differences, pupils were selected from three differently structured Malmö school districts. In each district use was made of the social index (S1 in the table below) computed by Edstrand & Swedner (1969). As will be seen, school A comes first according to this index, school C last.

Sex/School	A	B	C	
	S1 2.93	S1 2.19	S1 1.42	Total
Boys	36	32	29	97
Girls	37	24	33	94
Total	73	56	62	191

The 191 pupils comprising the project sample in the calculations have taken part in all the collections of data that have been made during the three years of the project. Participation in individual tests has been higher, in some cases almost 250. The remaining 191 have a somewhat higher value than the full number of participants in many of the tests.

3. LINGUISTIC QUALITY

The results now presented are to be taken as preliminary. The collection of data under the project was only concluded

a few months ago and processing is scheduled to continue for two years to come. However, certain tendencies may be presumed to have been relatively firmly established.

3.1 "At the Museum"

This first free written composition was written at the start of the autumn term in grade 4, i.e. as early as possible during the project. A detailed picture of children playing in a museum, in a room with stuffed animals on show, was administered as a stimulus. Many amusing situations occur in this picture and the pupils were highly delighted by them. They were told that they could keep to the picture if they wished but that they were also free to write about things which the picture called to mind. This written composition can therefore be said to have been very free. The picture and appurtenant instructions have been published previously (Hersvall et al, 1971).

3.2 Linguistic analysis

The essays were analysed with regard to linguistic structure. To this end a note was made among other things of:

graphic sentences, i.e. sentences defining what the pupils themselves had done
macrosyntagms, logical units comprising main clauses together with any subordinate clauses (evidently corresponding to the American term T-units) without regard to the pupils' own punctuation,
subordinate clauses,
sentence construction,
parts of speech,
components.

The analysis was made by philologists using the "Mamba" manual (Teleman, 1971) compiled for the Written Syntax project. As far as can be seen at present, this analysis differs from all others hitherto reported in that it is essentially complete, whereas other studies have preselected the linguistic phenomena to be studied.

3.3 Validation

The qualitative value of the linguistic phenomena obtained was assessed by means of correlations with awards for the essays and with separate language tests, including tests which previous surveys had shown to have a good relation to essay writing ability. These tests included correctness of language and disposition in the Swedish standardized achievement tests for the middle level of comprehensive school (cf Björnsson, 1960). Awards were made by persons with experience of teaching at this level and also by creativity researchers and, finally, by two teachers who assessed the essays on the strength of tape recordings, the object of this latter assessment being to eliminate the influence of handwriting, orthography and punctuation. The differences of detail between these assessments will not be given here. Instead we shall confine ourselves to correlations with a total award for all the judges. We may add that the correlations with the test consistently point in the same direction as the awards but that they equally consistently higher.

3.4 Some measures of the quality of essays

Some 400 measures of language from the essays have been validated. Of course, not all essays exemplify all of these measures, but we have avoided phenomena of which not a single case had occurred among roughly half or more of the

pupils. In other words, the linguistic analysis has not been worked to death. On the other hand more flexible assessments may very well be feasible at higher levels. Selecting a number of important measures of quality, we obtain the following tables.

"Top Nine"

Number of different words	+ 0.75
No. rows in the Mamba	+ 0.73
No. words	+ 0.73
No. words in frequency list Allén 1	+ 0.73
No. words in frequency list Hassler-Göransson 1	+ 0.73
No. punctuation marks	+ 0.72
No. graphic sentences	+ 0.71
No. non-recurring words	+ 0.71
No. primary adverbials	+ 0.70

The limit for the selection has been subjectively set at + 0.70. The overwhelming impression given by the table is that productivity is the best measure of quality. The more the pupils write of all kinds of phenomena, the better their awards. Some terms may require explanation. "Rows in the Mamba" implies that length depends not only on the number of words but also on the designations inserted in the text during analysis and showing where clauses begin. Consequently this measure also includes a certain degree of linguistic complexity. Frequency list 1 denotes the 200 commonest words. Non-recurrent words are words only occurring once in an essay but used by more than one pupil. Primary clauses are those which are only counted once, regardless of length. Adverbial clauses often comprise more than one word, e.g. adverbs of place with a preposition plus a noun.

It will be a matter of immediate interest to ascertain the importance the linguistic qualities when length is kept under control. In order to obtain some idea of this subject, partial correlations have been calculated between the total award and a number of linguistic measures with constant length, length here being defined as the number of words. This gives us the following table.

Some partial correlations with constant numbers of words

Different words	+ 0.24
Different nouns	- 0.04
Different pronouns	+ 0.13
Different adjectives	+ 0.36
Different verbs	+ 0.17
Different adverbs	+ 0.30
Different prepositions	+ 0.14

Here we can see what many experienced teachers have maintained: adjectives and verbs make essays more interesting to read. The negative correlation acquired by nouns may be due to the nature of the subject with a detailed picture used as a stimulus. Good essays are often built up around a theme with part of the picture in the centre, while poor essays tend very often to be incoherent enumerations of different situations in the picture.

Finally we can consider some measures of language which are intrinsically independent of the length of essay. These give us the following table.

Some measures independent of length

No. words per graphic sentence, mean value	- 0.20
No. words per macrosyntagm, dispersion	+ 0.30
Word length in letters, mean value	+ 0.23
Word length in letters, dispersion	+ 0.25

The first figure suggests that the pupils have difficulty with the simple division into sentences. Sentences are too long in the poorer essays. The next figure says that variations of length make a good impression. Both the figures for the construction of words show that a qualified and varied vocabulary is an advantage.

The next stage in the work of the project will be to combine different measures to give the best possible prediction of the mark. This done, the observations made will have to be transformed into instructions of pedagogical value. Thus it would be inept to counsel pupils in favour of writing long essays. On the other hand one could with a clear conscience underline the value of a variable vocabulary, ample and correct punctuation, and the amplification of sentence structure by the use of adverbial clauses.

3.5 Linguistic development

As the pupils involved in the project approached the end of middle level, they were set a new free composition on a similar subject, "On the Camping Site". The plan is for the linguistic content of this essay to be compared with the discoveries accruing from the essay "At the Museum". It is hoped that the analysis can be limited in the light of the results of the validation study. At the time of writing the final essay has recently been set and analysis has yet to begin.

3.6 Comparisons between children's language and adults'

The two types of language will be compared in a differential study, the disposition of which is explained in section 4.4, "The Children's Book". As a validation study this comparison entails the notation of a number of quality measures in the language of children and authors according to specific studies carried out previously.

4. STIMULUS MEASURES

Two kinds of study occur under this heading: questionnaires and experiments.

4.1 Writing activities

During the spring term in grade 4, a questionnaire was administered concerning the pupils' attitudes to various writing activities. These activities had been tabulated on the strength of an analysis of the text of the 1969 comprehensive school curriculum. The following summary shows a number of highly rated occupations and two which were given a low rating. The figures are based on a five-point scale with 5 as the maximum score.

Designation	Mean value
Write a story of your own imagining	3.91
Read stories written by your classmates	3.68
Write and tell about something which really happened to you	3.60
Write a letter to a friend	3.54
Write a diary	3.27
Write an account of a project in general subjects	3.24
...	
Write memory words or key words	1.92
Write a story containing particular words	1.90

A factor analysis was also carried out and led to the activities being grouped into what we termed guided, spontaneous and personal writing. Often guided writing was associated with stimulus in the form of words, spontaneous writing to non-verbal stimulus (e.g. pictures) and personal writing e.g. to diaries and letters. These three factors were used in other specific studies.

4.2 Essay subjects

In the light of Waern's interest surveys (1960) and the above mentioned factor analysis, 48 essay subjects were selected for assessment by the pupils on the basis of five-point scales. The following table shows some of the subjects given high and low ratings respectively.

Subject	Mean value
An Exciting Ghost Story	4.41
How I would like to furnish My Own Room	4.32
When I won a Competition at School	4.11
If I were a Famous Film Star	4.01
How Sweden won a World Championship	4.01
....	
Dangerous Things in the Home	2.83
My Unsuccessful Efforts to Help in the Home	2.82
What a Dictionary of My Own would look like	2.72
A Visit to an Exhibition of Art	2.70
From 8 to 5 at the Typewriter	2.61

Perhaps it is worth noting that three of the five most popular subjects contain the word "I".

Here too a factor analysis was made. The most interesting factor displays an element of creativity. The following subjects had the heaviest loadings:

When the Operator Crossed the Lines
If I were a Famous Film Star
Planning a Party
A Sad Story
An Exciting Ghost Story
How to write a Novel.

But not all creative subjects are popular. Evidently the work of imagining things can become too much of a strain at times.

4.3 "The Cat"

The three factors for writing activities and an a priori classification were used for experimental planning in six fields as outlined below.

Activity	Guided	Spontaneous	Personal
Empirical, descriptive	Words about appearance and food	Pictures about appearance and food	Diary about looking after a cat all by oneself
Emotional, narrative	Positive and negative adjectives	Pictures: "sweet" kitten and cat hunting birds	Remarks on advertisement about experiments on cats

It is only the first four squares that more formal comparison can really be made of the forms of stimulus. Some preliminary results have been computed, based on the assumption that there is a measure of productivity, in the present case the number of words, and a measure of structure, in the present case the number of words per punctuation mark. In this way we obtain two surveys.

No. words

	Guided	Spontaneous	Personal
Empirical	120	127	165
Emotional	150	161	94

On the whole we find that the tendency is for the values to rise from left to right and downwards, i.e. the freer the activity the greater the production. This tendency is reversed by the very last field. The teachers reported that the pupils found the subject difficult and that is was beyond them to form opinions on the complex issues indicated here, important as these issues naturally are even to children.

Words per punctuation mark

	Guided	Spontaneous	Personal
Empirical	6.96	8.72	9.33
Emotional	8.64	7.69	9.66

It will be recalled that a high proportion of punctuation marks, i.e. relatively few words per punctuation mark, was a sign of quality. The modes of stimulation then operate differently. The administration of words leads to better punctuation, presumably because the pupils divide up their sentences on the basis of the words given.

4.4 "The Children's Book"

The original purpose of this sub-study was to compare the language of authors whom the children liked reading with the language used by the children themselves. In doing so it was important to cover identical subjects. We arrived at a number of essay subjects which could be matched with chapters or similar extracts from children's books. By way of a special study we arranged for the subjects to be treated divided between the same groups of pupils as in the previous experimental study. The subjects, instructions and corresponding books are shown in the following summary.

Heading	Instruction	"Criterion"
The Wonderful Rescue	This book is about rescuing a friend in great danger.	Gripe, M. Pappa Pellerins dotter (Papa Pellerin's daughter) Wikström, O. Stå på dig Sverre (Keep it up, Sverre)
A Day at the Zoo	This book is about walking round looking at animals.	Linde, G. Med Lill-Klas i kappsäcken (A pony surprise) Sjöstrand, I. Kalle Vrånglebäck
An Imaginary Friend	This book is about what you want a friend to be like.	Wikström, O. Sverre vill inte gå hem (Sverre won't go home) Falk, A.M. Barbro finner en ö (Barbara discovers an island)
An Evening at the Amusements Park	This book is about things you can do at an amusements park.	Hellberg, H.E. Jan och Ann-Charlotte får en idé (Jan and Ann-Charlotte have an idea) Petersson, H. Bara Liselott (Just Lisa)
An Exciting Competition	This book is about a competition with a surprising result.	Hammenhög, W. På stadion (At the stadium) Inger, N. Piglet Ek
Planning to run away	This book is about thoughts of running away from home.	Ekerwald, C.G. Flippen rymmer (Flip runs away) Falk, A.M. Barbro finner en ö (Barbara discovers an island)

If we note the same values as for the previous essay, the next table shows how the subjects worked.

Subject	No. words	Words per punctuation mark
The Wonderful Rescue	271	10.23
A Day at the Zoo	245	8.13
An Imaginary Friend	181	8.75
An Evening at the Amusement Park	246	9.26
An Exciting Competition	241	7.50
Planning to run away	285	6.90

Clearly the subjects had considerable appeal to the pupils, for the numbers of words were large. The figures in the table do not reflect any connection between the two measures of quality.

4.5 "Near - Far"

The purpose of this sub-study was to see whether creativity was favoured by subjects dealing with more unusual matters. At the same time we wanted to see whether different instructions would produce any difference in the pupils' performance. A combination of two instructions and three subjects led to six fields in an experimental arrangement.

One typ of instructions included such words as exciting, interesting, resourceful, unusual and unexpected. The other type mentioned handwriting, spelling, punctuation and capital letters. The subject nearest at hand was "How I saved the Day when Our House was buried by Snow", the intermediate subject "How I saved the Day when we were stranded on an Uninhabited Island" and the most remote "How I saved the Day when we made a Force Landing on a Strange Planet".

At the time of writing analysis of the essays has only just begun. Our evaluation will concentrate on measures which are thought to represent creativity in writing.

5. SOCIAL DIFFERENCES

In studies of possible differences between social environments, the project will utilize the division of the pupils into school districts described in section 2 of this account. Only a few partial results are at present available. These suggest that differences exist and that they are as expected. But the differences are not always very great, nor are they primarily concerned with linguistic ability.

Subsequently we shall also try to place the individual home in conventional social classes. It should be possible to investigate the importance of the external social environment in the school district in relation to the internal environment of the home.

REFERENCES

Björnsson, C.H. Essay Assessment and Essay Writing. Stockholm: Almqvist A Wiksell, 1960. (Not translated).

Edstrand, G. & Swedner, H. School Segregation - of Course It Exists. Kommunal skoltidning, 1969, no. 38. (Not translated).

Hersvall, R.-M., Lindell E., Martinsson, A. & Nordlund, P. "Activity" and "Objectivity" in Free Written Composition. Malmö: Lärarhögskolan, stencil 1971. (Not translated).

Teleman, U. Manual of Sentence Analysis (MAMBA). Lund: Department of Applied Nordic Philology at the University of Lund, stencil 1971. (Not translated).

Waern, Y. Construction and Studies of an Interest Questionnaire. Stencil 1960. (Not translated).

Address:
Pedagogisk-psykologiska institutionen
Lärarhögskolan
Fack
S-200 45 MALMÖ 23